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THE CHAPEL
AND ITS
CONTIGUOUS BUILDINGS ON CHURCH STREET,
AT BETHLEHEM.
BY EDMUND DE SCHWEINITZ.

THERE are no old Moravian edifices historically more interesting in all America than the Row which begins on Church street, at Bethlehem, next above the large Moravian Church, and extends to the eastern end of the Sisters' House. We propose, in this article, to give a brief account of the same, based upon documents in the Bethlehem Archives, and upon personal recollections given us by aged inhabitants of the town.

Early in the year 1741, a little company of Moravian immigrants—namely, David and Anna Zeisberger, and their son David (afterwards the distinguished Missionary among the Indians), Mathias Seybold, Martin Mack, George Neisser, John Boehmer, Christian Frelich, Hannah Hummel, Benjamin Summers and his son James—under the superintendence of Bishop Nitschman, and of his uncle, Father Nitschman, as Master-Workman,* took possession of the first house of Bethlehem. It was a small log building, back of the Eagle Hotel, and was removed a number of years ago, to make way for a stable. About six months later, on the 28th of September, was laid the corner-stone for the second house. It was completed in 1742, and received the name of *Gemein-Haus*, or “Congregation House.” This structure still stands, at the northeast corner of Church Street and Cedar Alley. It originally extended from the Alley to its present eastern door.

On the second floor of this house was the first church of Beth-

* Father Nitschman is generally called the Founder of Bethlehem. But this title is a misnomer. He was merely the Master-Workman in building the first and second houses. Bishop Nitschman, his nephew, was the real Founder. He was sent over from Europe expressly in order to found the town.

lehem, consisting of a chapel—styled *Der Saal*, afterward *Der Kleine Saal*,—whose low ceiling was supported by four wooden pillars, which are yet to be seen in the partition walls of the four rooms into which, at a later day, it was divided. Two of these rooms are now occupied by the Rev. Peter Ricksecker, and two by Mrs. Rose. In January or February of 1742, this Chapel was used for the first time, having been dedicated by Count Zinzendorf, who often preached in it.* The Count had a private apartment on the same floor, at the West end, Mrs. Hillman's present room.

For nine years, from 1742 to 1751, the Brethren worshipped in this place. Here, too, representatives of the heathen nations to which they preached the glorious Gospel of the blessed God were received. In May of 1749, three converted Greenlanders, on a visit to the British Colonies, who had been baptized in their native country by Moravian Missionaries, here had an interview with converted Indians, from Gnadenhütten, on the Mahony, in the present Carbon County, Pennsylvania, who had been also baptized by Moravians. Again, in July of 1752, and March of 1753, two great councils were here held, between the Moravians and deputations of Nanticokes and Shawanese from the Wyoming Valley. This chapel is, however, particularly interesting, on account of the many Indians who were baptized into the death of Jesus, within its hallowed walls. We certainly know of no less than ninety-three who here received this sacrament, and who came from the Mohican, Delaware, Wampanoag, French Mohawk, Hoogland and Sopus Nations.† The first of these baptisms took place on the 16th of September, 1742, when David, a Mohican, the son of Abraham—who was the first Moravian convert from the North American Indians—was baptized by Count Zinzendorf, and Joshua, another Mohican, by Gottlob Büttner. A few days after, these two converts accompanied the Count on his second and very perilous tour through the Indian Country. The next baptism of note was that of the first Delaware converts, Gottilieb, and Mary, his wife, from Wampallowbank, on the Susquehanna, in the present

* Count Zinzendorf was on a visit to America from November, 1741, to the beginning of 1743.

† The information which we give in this article, respecting Indian Baptisms, is based upon the official Register of Indian Baptisms, preserved in the Bethlehem Archives.

Bradford County. Being of a distinguished family, and of the noble Tribe of the Turtle, their profession of Christianity caused intense excitement among the Delawares, and thirty warriors marched to Bethlehem, in order to carry them back by force to the hunting grounds and religion of their fathers. But the persuasions of the couple, and the kindness of the Moravians, changed these angry savages into friends.

In August, 1742, the Brethren prepared to enlarge the *Gemein-Haus*, and on the 19th of September the corner-stone for the eastern end was laid. This addition embraced the rooms now occupied by Mrs. Lehman, and the new Vestry Room attached to the renovated chapel. It was completed in August, 1743.

That stone edifice which forms the Western end of the main building of the present "Sisters' House," was next put up. It was to be a "Brethren's House." Count Zinzendorf himself selected its site, on the 7th of July, 1742. On the 13th, it was staked off, on the 8th of August the corner-stone was laid; and on the 6th of December, of the same year, the young men, or "Single Brethren," of the settlement for the first time made it their home. They occupied it until November 16, 1748, when they moved into a new house, which is now the old part of the Female Boarding School; their places being taken by the young women, or "Single Sisters," who had been living at Nazareth. Thus this building became the earliest Moravian "Sisters' House" in America.

The fourth part of the Row comprised the middle of the central building with the bell-turret. The lines which mark its original dimensions can be distinctly traced in the masonry. It had a door and two windows on the first, and three windows on the second story, fronting the green. On the 24th of August, 1745, it was staked off, and occupied in October of the following year. The lower floor contained a kitchen for the married couples of the settlement, and the "Single Brethren," together with a dining room for the former, who all took their meals at a common table; the upper floor was devoted to family rooms. On the 9th of June, 1746, the bell-turret was finished. The gilded device surmounting it—a Lamb with a Banner*—was suggested by Bishop Cammerhoff. The base of the turret showed the face of a brass clock,

* This is still the device of the official episcopal seal of the Moravian Church.

manufactured by Augustin Neisser, of Germantown, and in the turret hung three bells, cast by Samuel Powell, one of which struck the hours, and the other two the quarters. In 1748, the central building was enlarged, at its Eastern end, by the addition of that part now occupied, on the first floor, by Mrs. Führer, and on the second, by Mrs. John Rice; and in 1749, at its Western end, by the addition of a third part—the sixth house of the Row—at present inhabited by Mr. Jacob Stolzenbach, on the first story, and Mrs. Hofman, on the second.

Hence, at the close of 1750, the Row consisted, first of the log *Gemein-Haus*, where lived the clergy of Bethlehem; second, of the central stone building with the turret, the residence of families; and, third, of the corner “Sisters’ House.”

In February, 1751, the town having now a population of over two hundred souls, was discussed the project of filling up the Row both to the East and to the West. It met with favor, and the settlers resolved to erect, on the Eastern side, a wing to the “Sisters’ House,” and, on the Western, a large place of worship. The latter was undertaken first. At that time the colony at Bethlehem was under the direction of Bishop John Nitschman,* assisted by the youthful Bishop Cammerhoff, who died a few months after.

Timber having been floated down the Lehigh River from Gnadenhütten—where the Moravians had a saw-mill—and the ground having been broken on the 5th of April, the work proceeded with extraordinary dispatch. On the first floor a large room, laid with square tiles, was constructed as a new dining-hall for the married couples; on the second floor was to be the chapel. By the middle of May the building was under roof. The roof was covered with tiles, and large buttresses were masoned up outside in order to render the whole structure more secure; after a time, however, the tiles being deemed too heavy, shingles were substituted (1753).

* Born, 1703, at Schönau, in Moravia. He was consecrated a Bishop in 1741. In 1749 he came to America as Bishop Spanenberg’s successor, and remained until 1751, when he went to England, where he resided six years. In 1760 he was appointed Superintendent of the Moravian Church in Holland. There he continued until his death, May 6, 1772. His first wife, Julianna Nitschmann was one of the eighteen young women at Herrnhut who formed that covenant out of which grew the class or choir of “Single Sisters.” She died at Bethlehem, February 22, 1751, and was buried in the exact centre of the Burial Ground, in the middle path.

On the 9th of July this second church of Bethlehem stood finished
It was, therefore, built in three months and four days.

The dedication took place the day after its completion, Saturday, the 10th of July, 1751, and was conducted by Bishop John Nitschmann. A number of Moravians from Nazareth, Maguntsche—now Emmaus—Christian's Spring and Friedenthal, had arrived to be present at the solemnities. In the forenoon, at 11 o'clock, the children had their last Saturday Lovefeast in the old Chapel*—at that time there were Lovefeasts every Saturday for them and for the adult membership—and were catechized in the presence of many guests. Soon after, the dedicatory service was held in the new Chapel. It was altogether of a liturgical character, and opened with the hymn: "Christi Blut und Gerechtigkeit—Sei dieses Hauses Herrlichkeit." A lengthy ode followed, composed for the occasion by the Bishop, and sung by the whole congregation. The *Te Agnum*—a liturgical service of that day—was chanted in conclusion, kneeling. In the afternoon, at one o'clock, a general Lovefeast was celebrated, on which occasion the choir performed a Cantana with great and solemnizing power, and Bishop Nitschmann delivered an address on the Old Testament Text for that day: "And Sharon shall be a fold of flocks." (Is. lxv. 10.)

The Bishop said amongst the rest:

We who live in the blessed times to which the prophet refers, have a right to apply the promise of our text with special directness to ourselves. It concerns us in particular. For the Lamb of God in whom we believe is worth more to us than all the world. His sufferings and His merits, His whole passion even to His death, are our constant theme. In time and eternity we know nothing dearer and more blessed than the Saviour with His wounds. He is, among us, the beginning, the middle, the end. To the doctrine of the Cross will we hold as long as we live. When we speak to undying souls, we speak of this; when our churches are open, our churches resound with this. Whoever attempts to attack us in this point, attempts our life; but we stand fast like a wall and resist him.

Therefore, in this new sanctuary also, our mouths from out the abundance of our hearts, shall proclaim Christ Jesus and Him Crucified. Is there any one who would give a different keynote

* This Chapel, thereafter known as *der kleine Saal*, continued, in subsequent years, to be used for occasional services, until one-half of it was partitioned off into two dwelling-rooms. Of the use to which the remaining half was then put, this article treats in a subsequent part.

to our discourses, who would lead us past and away from the Cross, let him be banished ! We have built this house, this habitation of the Lord of Hosts, in order that Jesus, our Saviour, may here be among us ; in order that He may here, in His dyed garments, bathed in His own blood, which is for us the blood of atonement, go from seat to seat, and pardon, bless, sanctify believing sinners. Every corner of this sanctuary shall be sprinkled with blood, every part of it shall be filled with the mighty rushing wind of the Spirit.*

The great theme among the Moravians of that day, and which remains their prominent doctrine, is beautifully and forcibly unfolded in this extract.

The last service was held in the evening, when (probably) Rev. Christopher Pyrlæus,† of Maguntsche, spoke on two texts combined, namely, "He that shutteth, and no man openeth," (Rev. iii. 7.) and "Knock and it shall be opened unto you," (Matt. vii. 8). The Chapel was provided with an organ, which was used at all these services. At a later time, its walls were adorned with paintings, by Haidt, the Moravian artist, representing incidents in the life of Christ. After it had been abandoned, these paintings were, most unhappily, sold to strangers.

In the year following the dedication, the building opposite to the Chapel, consequently the eighth part of the Row, was completed, as a wing of the "Sisters' House," containing among the rest, a large sleeping-hall. This wing was occupied for the first time on the 10th of May (1752,) and the occasion was festively signalized by a shad-dinner to which one hundred blooming "Single Sisters," and "Great Girls" sat down. Therefore, in 1752, the Row, beginning at its Western end, included, first, the *Gemein-Haus*, the residence of the Ministers and Missionaries, second, the Chapel, third, the Central Building, used as a School for the Children, and fourth, the "Sisters' House" to the end of the original corner building. Thus it remained for twenty-one years, and then, in

* Extracted, in a free translation, from the Bethlehem Diary of July 10, 1751, a MS. in the Bethlehem Archives.

† He was born in Swabia in 1713, studied at the University of Leipzig, joined the Moravians, came to America in 1742, preached for the Lutherans of Philadelphia, as Count Zinzendorf's adjunctus, lived among the Mohawks and learned their language, which he afterward taught to a class of candidates for missionary service, and became a very active minister of the Moravians in this country. He died May 28th, 1785, at Herrnhut. He was an ancestor of Mrs. Henry Luckenbach, of Bethlehem.

1773, the last, or ninth, part of the Row was erected, namely the Eastern addition to the "Sisters' House," that long stone structure which fronts Church Street. Hence it appears, that the Row as we now see it, was built at nine different times, during a period of thirty-two years.

We return to the history of the Chapel. For nearly fifty-five years, from the 10th of July, 1751, to the 18th of May, 1806, it constituted the Bethlehem Church. Within its walls, too, wild Indians confessed the Saviour and were baptized. Thirty-six such baptisms are recorded after its dedication, but some of these probably took place in the old Chapel. The first adult Indians baptized in the new, were a Delaware family, consisting of husband and wife—Tobias and Anna Maria—and one child, Gertrude. This was in the evening of Sunday, the 27th of February, 1752. In the midst of an overflowing congregation baptism was administered to Tobias by Martin Mack,* to Anna Maria by Bishop Hehl,† and to Gertrude by the Missionary Graff. Tobias had twelve male, and Anna Maria twelve female, members of the Bethlehem congregation as sponsors. Another notable baptism was that of Elizabeth, wife of Paxnous, of Wyoming, a celebrated Delaware chief. It took place in her husband's presence, with unusual solemnity, Bishop Spangenberg officiating, on the 17th of February, 1755, but a few months before the breaking out of that terrible Indian War in the course of which the Missionaries on the Mahoney were massacred.

The last Indian baptism in the Chapel, in old times, occurred on the 6th of January, 1763, when Bishop Peter Böhler baptized a young Delaware girl named Salome. In modern times, however, after the lapse of one hundred and four years, such an occasion again presented itself, on the 28th of February, 1867, when the writer of this article baptized three grandchildren of the late Hon. John Ross, Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation. They were, at that time, living at Bethlehem, but have now gone back to their own people.

In the ordinary ministrations of the sanctuary a number of

* One of the first settlers at Bethlehem, afterward a distinguished Missionary among the Indians, finally a Missionary Bishop in the W. I., where he died.

† For many years the Superintendent of a circuit of Moravian churches of which Litiz, Pa., was the centre.

clergymen at various times, officiated in this Chapel, of whom the most prominent were John Nitschman, Christopher Pyrlæus, Augustus Spangenberg, Nathaniel Seidel, Matthew Hehl, John Ettwein, Andrew Huebener, John F. Frueauff, Jeremiah Denke, Augustus Klingsohr, Jacob Van Vleck, George H. Loskiel, Christian F. Schaaf, and Andrew Benade. Here also, during the period of his second protracted visitation in America, from 1784 to 1787, often preached the venerable Bishop John de Watteville.*

Among the many visitors from different parts of the country who were attracted to Bethlehem, and who often worshipped with the Brethren in this sanctuary, we find some of the most distinguished characters of the American Revolution. Here George Washington, Horatio Gates, the Marquis La Fayette, and other Generals heard that Gospel which proclaims a crucified Saviour; here John Hancock, Samuel Adams, James Duane, Richard Henry Lee, William Duer, Henry Laurens, Benjamin Harrison, John Adams, Henry Marchant, William Williams, and other members of the Continental Congress, listened to the words of salvation as they fell from the lips of John Ettwein.

On the 25th of June, 1792, the semi-centenary of the Bethlehem congregation was observed with many solemnities. On that occasion an historical paper was read, setting forth, amongst the rest, that in the past fifty years, since the founding of Bethlehem, 150 white adults and 215 Indians and Negroes had been baptized in the two chapels, and 134 persons ordained to the holy Ministry, namely 5 Bishops, 27 Priests, and 102 Deacons.*

We are enabled to present an interior view of the Chapel and its adjacent buildings, four years later, as the same was described to us by the only survivor of the inmates of the *Gemein-Haus* in the last

* He was accompanied on this visitation by his wife, the Countess Benigna, Zinzendorf's eldest daughter, who, forty-two years before, had been in America with her father, and who now again took up her abode in that *Gemein-Haus* at the dedication of which she had been present, where she afterward lodged, and in which her oldest daughter was now domiciled as the wife of John Christian Alexander de Schweinitz.

* These facts are obtained from memoranda written by the late Rev. John F. Frueauff at the time of the semi-centenary celebration. The memoranda say, further, that in the first half century of the existence of Bethlehem, 614 children were born; 625 persons were buried on the Church Ground; 800 Moravians immigrated to Bethlehem from Europe; and of the 80 persons who formed the first congregation, 7 were still living in 1792.

century. Mrs. Barbara Boehler, who died in 1865, as a matron of eighty-nine years, came to live in the *Gemein-Haus* in 1796, as housekeeper in the family of John Christian Alexander de Schweinitz, and thus learned to know the structure thoroughly. At that time it was inhabited by six clergymen and their families. Jacob Van Vleck, Principal of the Female Boarding School, occupied the first floor of the West end, Mrs. Lydia Rice's present rooms, and Jeremiah Denke, the *Gemeinhelfer*, or principal Pastor, the second floor of the same end, now held by Mrs. Hillman. Augustus Klingsohr, the Minister of the Congregation, had the two front rooms of the second story of the middle part; the two rooms back of these, looking out on the yard, were one apartment called *Das Sälchen*—a part of the first Chapel—and devoted to betrothals and various private religious meetings. These are now the rooms of Rev. Peter Ricksecker, and of Mrs. Rose. Returning to the first floor by the Western staircase, we find where Mrs. Herbst lives, the apartment of John Jungman, who had been a faithful Missionary among the Indians, and was spending the evening of his life in retirement; and in the two front rooms—Mr. Anton's and Mr. Transue's—as well as in the two rooms at the Eastern end (Mrs. Lehman's), the dwelling of John Christian Alexander de Schweinitz, the first Administrator of the American Property of the *Unitas Fratrum*.† His office was Mr. Anton's present room. The apartment on the first floor, back of the Eastern stair-case, formed the Vestry Room, where the clergy assembled before public service, and whence they moved in procession to the *Arbeiter-Bank* in the Chapel. On the second floor of the East end, the present new Vestry Room and the one adjoining, in the South-east corner (Mrs. Lehman's), were Bishop Ettwein's, who was President of the Provincial Conference. The hall-room, with an inside window toward the former Chapel-door—now the recess of the pulpit—was the robing-room for the clergy, where they put on their surplices on sacramental occasions. On the garret of the East end were the Archives of the Church.

Entering the Chapel itself, we see the Minister's table, covered with black cloth, on a low platform, about the middle of the Western

* From 1770, when he came to America and when this office was created, to 1867, when it ceased, there were five Administrators, namely, John Christian Alexander de Schweinitz, John Gebhard Cunow, Lewis David de Schweinitz, son of the first, Philip H. Goepp, and Eugene A. Frueauff, grandson of the first.

wall. To the South of it, along the wall, sat the clergy, according to their official rank, on the so-called *Arbeiter-Bank* (clerical Bench)* and at the North of it, their wives and the female Superintendents of the "Sisters' House," on a similar bench. Facing the male *Arbeiter-Bank*, and therefore looking to the West, was the male membership of the congregation, and facing the female *Bank*, the female membership, the children in front on each side, according to their sex. Between the former side-door—closed up since the renovation—and the northern wall, running from east to west as the pews do now, were benches for the pupils of the Female Boarding School. The same side door was the entrance exclusively for females, who came from the green through the middle door of the central building and passed up a hall which is now converted into a room. Males, as also the clergy and their wives, entered the Chapel by the large door from the *Gemein-Haus*. On a narrow gallery above the present pulpit, was the organ, and the place for the church-musicians and singers. Between the several windows, around the entire Chapel, hung, in black frames, the paintings of Haidt above referred to, and setting forth the life of the Saviour, from His birth to His burial.

The central building was given up to the uses of the Female Boarding School,* and the ~~rest~~ of the Row was the "Sisters' House," as now.

Such is an interior view of the Chapel and of the other buildings sixty-nine years ago.

In 1803, when Bethlehem had a population of 580 souls, the third church was begun, the wonder of the whole neighborhood. Three years later, in 1806, it was finished in all its present dimensions, being at that time the largest church in Pennsylvania.

On the 18th of May, at eight o'clock in the morning, the last service was conducted in the Chapel, by Bishop Loskiel, a brief thanksgiving for the mercies which God had vouchsafed to His people as often as they had worshipped in this sanctuary. Then, while the trombonists played a melody known as "Unsern Ausgang segne Gott, unsern Eingang gleichermaszen," a procession, headed by the clergy, was formed, and the whole congregation moved

* The main building of this School no longer exists. It stood on the site of the present Parochial School.

solemnly into the present Church, which was thereupon dedicated with great rejoicing.

In the half century that followed, the "old Church," as it now came to be called, was put to different uses. First, it became the Chapel of the Female Boarding School, where the public examinations and exhibitions were held, until the institution was removed to its present locality, in 1815. Next, it was converted into an Archives-Room, in which the Library and Papers of the Church were arranged. These having been transferred to one of the East end apartments of the large Church, the Chapel was turned into a concert-hall for the Philharmonic Society of Bethlehem. As such it was used for many years. During this period, however, while the late Rev. Charles F. Scidel was Principal of the Boarding School, English religious service was, at one time, statedly held in it; and in 1854, when the new pulpit was built and other alterations were made in the large Church, it was the place of worship for the whole congregation.

Fifty years after it had been vacated, on the first Sunday of 1856, it was a second time constituted a regular place of worship. Bethlehem was no longer a Moravian settlement. Its exclusive system had been given up for thirteen years; the town, thrown open to all, had greatly increased, and contained several churches of other denominations. The Moravian congregation, too, had received large accessions, and it became necessary to have two sanctuaries in which the Gospel could be simultaneously preached, in the English and the German languages. Hence, for eight years, the large church and the chapel were both used for stated worship, English and German services alternating in each. The last of these in the original chapel was held on Sunday, the 24th of July, 1864, and in the same week a complete renovation of this sanctuary was begun. Owing to the great difficulty of getting workmen, during the time of the Civil War which then prevailed, this undertaking was not completed until the Spring of the following year. On the 2d of April, 1865, the renovated Chapel was rededicated to the Triune God.

Three years later, in the summer of 1868, the extension of the *Gemein-Haus*, the oldest edifice in the Borough of Bethlehem, was completely renovated, to the satisfaction of its inmates, but the sorrow of all antiquaries. It now presents the appearance of a common tenement house, cased in painted boards.